

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS ISTANBUL 001627

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: KURDISH LANGUAGE NUDGES INTO PRIME TIME

1. (SBU) Summary: In a small sign that Turkey's EU reforms are beginning to have some impact, Kurdish singer Ciwan Haco performed on a popular prime time television show on October 25. The show's host, Hulya Avsar, herself half-Kurdish, took pains to strike a balance between Turkish patriotism and Kurdish cultural expression. Despite initial hesitation by the television station, Haco interviewed only in Kurmanji (the most widely spoken Kurdish language in Turkey), using a translator. While no major milestone in linguistic freedom, the 15-minute performance and interview suggests there may be greater room to maneuver on "mother tongue" issues in the future. End Summary.

Hulya and the Show

2. (U) Actress/singer Hulya Avsar's eponymous show featured a rarity in Turkish broadcasting on October 25: Kurdish singing and discussion. Avsar, a native of Edremit, is the daughter of a Kurdish father and Turkish mother. Her highly-rated show, sponsored by British retailers Marks & Spencer, is popular with youth of both sexes, and some middle-aged Turks. The show airs on Saturday evenings at 11pm on a major Istanbul-based station, Kanal D.

3. (SBU) Kanal D producers sought to soften the impact of inviting a Kurdish pop star to perform on the show. Poloff learned from Haco's translator, who also appeared on the show, that the program executives initially asked Haco to talk with Avsar in English. Haco (a Syrian-born Kurd who lives in Norway and speaks fluent English) refused, saying that he was a Kurd and wished to perform and speak in Kurmanji. Poloff contacts opined that Haco's status as a citizen of another country may have made it easier to get Kurmanji past nervous television executives.

Elderly Counter-balance

4. (U) Ultimately, Haco's wishes prevailed, but his appearance was preceded by a short interview with a 105-year-old Turkish veteran of the Turkish War of Independence. The feisty vet (who brought his bayonet with him and discussed the three Greeks he killed with it) talked of letting Ataturk drink water from his hands, and was a clear counterweight to Haco's Kurmanji performance.

5. (U) Following the elderly veteran, Haco was introduced and began by conversing with Avsar in Kurmanji. Avsar, after somewhat nervously saying that she was in fact partially Kurdish, spoke little herself, but recognized and used several basic phrases. (Note: Older Turks with whom poloff spoke said this was not the first time Hulya had taken some risks professionally. Avsar once publicly defended Ibrahim Tatlis, an icon of Turkish arabesk music who at one time was banned by the government. End note.) Two Kurmanji songs by Haco followed the interview.

Comment

6. (SBU) To date, post is not aware of any press reaction to the Kurdish performance. Use of a "mother tongue" language, even briefly, without major outcry, is a small step forward. The true litmus test, however, will be the introduction of regular "mother tongue" broadcasting, something which was legalized as part of the 2002 EU reforms, but which has yet to be implemented. End comment.

SMITH